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ABSTRACT

A review of the goals and issues in the development and evaluation of the middle school concept is presented. Although there has been a great increase in the number of middle schools, many seem to be organized without careful planning of goals, programs and evaluation strategies. A review of the problems involved led to the formation of fifteen questions. The questions are designed to serve as a framework for discussions of problems and functions which may lead to the formulation of testable hypothesises and the development of strategies for the evaluation of the middle school and its programs. (BB)

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THE GROWING NEED FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL EVALUATION

by

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During the past dozen years of my advocacy of the middle school as a promising alternative for the schooling of 10 to 14 year-olds, I have consistently urged careful evaluation of the middle school organization and indeed of each middle school and of the various innovations introduced in middle schools. Indeed The Emergent Middle School[1] included a chapter on evaluation and its authors have worked with various schools and with several doctoral students to utilize evaluation procedures. Yet none of the collaborators in this volume and in the middle school movement in general can feel at all complacent about the progress made in middle school evaluation. The need for more evaluation in general and for particular purposes is indicated by the following review of middle school goals, development, and evaluation.

Goals of the Middle School

The statements of goals of individual middle schools differ, and some differences appear in general statements of rationale for the movement, but the following three goals are believed to have been commonly accepted:

1. To provide a better program of schooling for children passing from childhood to adolescence than the usual program provided in other organizational arrangements.

2. As a new organization, to facilitate the introduction and evaluation of innovative practices in the school system.

3. As a bridge between the elementary and high school, to facilitate continuous progress education.

In general goals of the second and third types above are found only in statements by theorists and in some school district statements, with the first general goal usually broken down into more specific statements of the goals of individual middle schools.

Evaluation has been heavily preoccupied with checking on the quality of the program of the individual middle school or with gathering of data regarding the characteristics of middle schools, learners, and teachers. Important as these efforts are, evaluation related to two of three major middle school goals is as yet unreported.

The Middle School Movement

Although forerunners of the current middle schools existed as upper elementary, intermediate, or junior highs without ninth grades, nearly all of today's middle schools have been established in their present organizations (usually grades 5-8, 6-8, or nongraded for these 3 or 4 years) in the last decade. Several national surveys[2] indicated a doubling every two years after 1965 to a total number in 1970 of over 2000 schools having middle school grade organizations (including grades 6 and 7 and not less than 3 or more than 5 grades). An estimate of at least 3000 to 4000 such schools today seems sound.

The schools reorganized or newly established as middle schools sometimes seem different from prior organizations only in the grades included. The Mellinger and Rackauskas survey of middle school principals' classification of their schools found that over 2/3 of the respondents considered their

schools to be or to be becoming real middle schools,[3] but one worries about the almost 1/3 of the schools considered neither as being or as moving toward being what they were supposed to be!

In too many cases a middle school has been organized as an administrative convenience without careful planning of its goals, program, and evaluation. Yet the efforts being made by teacher education institutions, professional organizations, and established middle schools are observed to be having marked impact in helping middle school personnel new and/or uncertain about their jobs to develop a distinct role for themselves and a specific identity for their schools. Even so, role and identity have been critical problems in the burgeoning movement. They will remain so until well-developed goal statements are developed for each middle school, and for groups of middle schools under common administrative arrangements, with well-executed plans for securing and utilizing goal-related evaluative data that can be consulted by the goal-setters and planners periodically to determine how well their goals are being achieved.

Evaluation Needs

The number of dissertations and research projects related to middle schools has definitely been increasing. In the fall of 1971, students in the writer's middle school course could identify a total of only 12 dissertations and other research projects dealing with the middle school, but this past fall, two years later, 43 studies (29 dissertations and 14 ERIC-reported projects) were identified.[4] Data are not available, unfortunately, to indicate the number of school districts and individual middle schools that are carrying on some type of evaluative studies of their own programs and practices. Certainly many such studies are needed to help individual middle

schools identify and remedy gaps between school goals and performance.

As to evaluating the middle school as it has been emerging the past dozen years now, there simply has not been sufficient agreement on goals, program, and evaluation to have an adequate base for such a comprehensive evaluation, much less the time, money, and manpower to do it. Probably some significant questions can now be asked and hopefully answered through research and evaluation. My observation of the problems middle schools have in achieving the three broad goals for the middle school listed earlier in this paper, lead me to regard as critical the following questions:

1. How can middle school teachers be helped to understand, and to relate well to, students in the transitional years from childhood to adolescence?
2. How can middle school teachers and the parents of their students share effectively in goal-setting, planning and evaluation?
3. How can middle school students and their teachers work together cooperatively and successfully in determining objectives and planning learning activities and in evaluating programs?
4. How can middle school teachers diagnose each student's needs for individual instruction and his readiness for independent study, and effectively stimulate student interest and effort in both?
5. How can the entire adult community work together to help transescents understand and successfully adjust to their physiological and psycho-social development?
6. How can the principal and support staff help faculty and students to voice and to deal constructively with their felt problems and needs?
7. How can the human resources of school and community be identified and used effectively in providing for the range of special interest development

possible and desirable for the individual middle school's own population?

8. How can subject matter and related learning experiences best be organized to help middle school students along their own learning continuums?
9. How can teachers of the same middle school students most effectively share their information about students and their expertise in instruction?
10. How can the adult models in a middle school be selected and used to responsibly and successfully guide the valuing processes of middle school students?
11. How can a middle school faculty and its leaders adequately reconcile and utilize the missions and demands of special interest groups from the local community and elsewhere?
12. How can fiscal control agencies and school personnel cooperate in providing the special support needed for a "lighthouse" school?
13. How can a middle school faculty be helped to demonstrate with security and satisfaction their program to faculties of other schools? How can the other faculties be helped to understand and evaluate it for their own use?
14. How can program planners for the middle school best help to connect and correct the programs of their and other levels toward continuous progress education?
15. How can individual middle school faculties give and receive help and support from other middle schools?

This list asks many broad questions asked and not answered for schooling in general. Although it is not exhaustive it is proposed here for several possible uses. First, the questions might be restated as a partial set of

guidelines or criteria for evaluating individual middle schools. Second, most questions would yield alternative or multiple answers, which might be treated as hypotheses, some of these hopefully testable. Third, the questions which can be stated so as to relate to schools at any level may be suggestive of broad scale, significant research related to continuous progress or other goals and patterns of vertical systems of education. Finally, the most appropriate use of the 15 questions is probably as a discussion or survey starter to develop agreed-upon lists of statements of problems, purposes, barriers, and other types of hypotheses for use in continuing evaluation of and for middle schools.

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2. See Cuff, William A., "Middle Schools on the March," NASSP Bulletin 51:82-86 (February, 1967); William M. Alexander, A Survey of Organizational Patterns of Reorganized Middle Schools (USOE Cooperative Research Report 7-D-026), Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida, 1968; Kealy, Ronald P., Middle Schools in the United States, Nashville, Tenn.: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1970; and Mellinger and Rackauskas, John H., Quest for Identity: National Survey of the Middle School, 1969-70, Chicago: Chicago State College, 1970.

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3. Mellinger and Rackauskas, p. 29.

4. Davis, Joy, "Research on the Middle School Through August, 1973: An Annotated Bibliography," Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida, Fall, 1973. (Prepared for Ed701, mimeographed).